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SUBJECT: TUNISIA: LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN RULING PARTY,
INTERNAL SECURITY STRUCTURE

REF: A. TUNIS 36

[1](#)B. TUNIS 34

[1](#)C. TUNIS 26

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On January 26, the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) announced a new line-up for its politburo, switching out its female member and expanding its membership from nine to ten to make room for Kamel Morjane, recently appointed Foreign Minister. Meanwhile, a senior Interior Ministry official, Adel Touiri, was appointed to the Ministry's number two slot and three-time governor Mohammed Lamine Al-Abed was appointed to head the National Guard. Some Tunisian observers believe that Touiri and Abed are each allies of the First Lady, and speculate that the appointments signal a consolidation of her influence over the security services. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Following Ben Ali's early January cabinet shuffle (reftels), the GOT announced January 26 two changes to the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally's (RCD) Political Bureau. The politburo was expanded in size to include newly appointed Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane. Abdelwahab Abdallah, though removed as Foreign Minister, retained his seat in the RCD politburo and rejoined the "shadow cabinet," presumably in charge of communications and the media, within the Presidential Palace. Abdallah is seen by civil society contacts as an ally of the First Lady and an active opponent of freedom of expression.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The one woman in the RCD politburo, Alifa Farouk, the was replaced by another woman, Neziha Zarrouk. Press reports suggest Alifa Farouk may be appointed as Ambassador to Germany. Zarrouk is the second Vice President of the Chamber of Advisors (the upper house in the Tunisian Parliament) and a member of the RCD Central Committee. She was Ambassador to Lebanon 2002 - 2004 and Minister of Vocational Training and Employment in 2001. From 1995-1999 she was Minister of Women and Family Affairs under the Prime Minister's office. In 1999 the office was upgraded to an independent Cabinet level Ministry and she continued to hold the office until 2002.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The remaining positions in the Political Bureau remained the same:

-- Mohamed Ghannouchi, Vice President of the RCD (long-term member);

-- Mohamed Ghariani, Secretary General of the RCD (member since 2008);

-- Abdallah Kallel, President of the Chamber of Advisors (long-term member);

-- Fouad M'bazaa, President of the Chamber of Deputies (long-term member);

-- Abdelaziz Ben Dhia, Minister of State and special Advisor to the President (long-term member);

-- Ahmed Iyadh Ouederni, Chief of Staff to the President (member since 2006);

-- Rafik Belhaj Kacem, Minister of Interior and Local Development (member since 2006).

¶4. (C) Another significant personnel shuffle, announced on January 26, took place within the Interior Ministry. Adel Touiri, the number three in the Ministry, was promoted to Director General of National Security - the second highest position in the Ministry and a position once held by Ben Ali himself when he was an ambitious official in the Bourguiba era. Touiri is one of Tunisia's most experienced security officials, having risen through the ranks of the Interior Ministry to serve most recently as Director-General for Special Services, and before that as Director of External Security. He is described by acquaintances as a tireless worker. Touiri is rumored to be close to Mrs. Ben Ali. Meanwhile, Mohamed Lamine El Abed, who had been Governor of Nabeul and previously Governor of Sfax, and Kasserine among other positions, was appointed head of the National Guard on January 26. El Abed is also rumored to be close to the First Lady.

¶5. (C) Comment: Some observers who engage in (heavily speculative) analysis of political rivalries within the presidential palace are interpreting the appointments of Touiri and Abed as a power play by Mrs. Ben Ali, who is widely thought to be preparing for "the day after" the

eventual transition from President Ben Ali's reign. On the other hand, Touiri's long experience may have made him a natural choice for the job in any case. The appointment of Kamel Morjane to the RCD politburo, accommodated by expanding the size of politburo membership, also supports the theory that his star is rising, and we note that Morjane, who is related through marriage to the Ben Ali family, is thought to be squarely outside the First Lady's orbit of influence. As for Abdullah, though he lost his position as Foreign Minister, both his preservation of his seat at the RCD table, and his move back to the presidential palace, demonstrate that those who were writing his political obituary were doing so hastily. End comment.

GRAY